

# BACK FENCE



Veterans Continuing to serve

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## THE DVS

# Agency Does Much to Aid Virginia's Veterans

Almost daily we read or hear about the active military service of numerous individual Virginians and their return home from defending our freedoms. As our servicemembers come home, it is important that we consider and reaffirm our commitment to keeping the promises made to those who have answered the call to serve. This could never be truer than now, as the General Assembly and the Governor consider the appropriate balance between sustained funding for transportation and continued commitment to core services provided by the Commonwealth, including services to veterans.



JOHN MONTGOMERY

More than 750,000 veterans call Virginia home, meaning that it has the 11th-largest population of veterans in the country. The Commonwealth's long-standing commitment to veterans has never been stronger. In 2003, with overwhelming bipartisan support from the General Assembly, Mark Warner, then Virginia's Governor, greatly expanded veterans' services. Part of this expansion and improvement was the consolidation of services in the Virginia Department of Veterans Services (DVS) under the first commissioner of Veterans Services.

According to its mission statement, the DVS is "to serve Virginia's veterans and their beneficiaries by ensuring they receive the benefits, support, quality care, and recognition they have earned through service and sacrifice." While the DVS works closely with the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), the DVS is independent of federal agencies and is Virginia's effort, on your and my behalf, to keep its promise to its veterans.

## Assisting in Access to VA Benefits

The DVS serves Virginia's veterans in two primary ways. First, the agency assists veterans in gaining full access to all the federal benefits provided by the VA. This effort is furthered in a variety of ways, including "Supermarkets of Veterans Services" held in communities across Virginia. These one-stop, all-day workshops bring together representatives from federal, state, and private agencies to assist veterans and their families in understanding and accessing the various available services and support opportunities.

The second way the DVS aids veterans is by providing direct, hands-on services. With more than 300 employees and a budget of almost \$18 million, the



DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS SERVICES

**Skilled nursing and assisted-living care for veterans is provided at Salem Medical Center.**

DVS assists veterans through four service-delivery sections: Care Centers, Education, Benefits, and Cemeteries.

— **Care Centers.** Virginians can be very proud of the DVS' care centers, which provide skilled nursing and assisted-living care to veterans. The original Virginia Veterans Care Center is a 240-bed facility located adjacent to the Salem Medical Center. The current renovation of this facility demonstrates the Commonwealth's commitment to provide top-notch care to its former servicemembers.

The Salem facility soon will be augmented by the new Sitter-Barfoot Veterans Care Center. On November 1, 2005, ground was broken on this state-of-the-art facility located next to the McGuire Medical Center in Richmond. When completed in the spring of 2007, Sitter-Barfoot will provide an additional 160 beds and skilled nursing care for Virginia's veterans. Additionally, the DVS has applied for federal funds to add another 80 beds as early as 2008.

— **State-Administered GI Education Benefits.** The DVS' education service component is centered on facilitating the VA's education services, more commonly known as GI Bill Education Benefits. Every veteran since World War II has qualified for one or more of these education programs under the family of GI Bills. These benefits aid in recruiting young people to serve in the military and in helping servicemembers transition back to civilian life.

## Help With College

The DVS' role is to approve post-secondary education programs (colleges, universities, trade schools, etc.) so that veterans can use their GI Bill benefits. Currently, there are more than 550 programs approved by the DVS for Virginia veterans to attend using their GI Bill programs.

— **DVS Benefits Services.** The DVS' benefits serv-

ices have the potential to serve more veterans than any other DVS service component except for burial services. In short, the DVS' benefits services are the outreach or marketing arm of the agency. The department's 28 service representatives located in its service center and in 19 field offices across the state helped veterans file more than 18,000 claims in 2005. This demand will only grow as more veterans return home and leave active service, the National Guard, and the Reserves.

— **Virginia's State Veterans Cemeteries.** Every one who has attended a veteran's funeral service with military honors has been moved and changed forever. To a veteran, keeping the promise to a fellow servicemember of a proper burial is the extension of the solemn creed of "leave no one behind." From the first day of taking the oath to "defend the Constitution," soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines eat, breathe, and live the unique-to-the-military principle that no mission is complete until everyone comes home. Virginia's burial services help veterans meet this obligation to their fellow veterans.

Virginia owns and operates two veterans' cemeteries: Albert G. Horton, Jr., Memorial Cemetery in Suffolk, and the Virginia Veterans Cemetery in Amelia. These two facilities combined provided funerals for more than 600 veterans in 2005. These numbers promise to increase significantly, as shown by record services in February, 2006, of more than 75 burials between the two cemeteries.

— **Future Challenges.** It is expected that the DVS' budget will need to be expanded to \$33 million and that the agency will need to increase the number of employees to more than 300 in the next two years. Veterans' care needs have been conservatively forecast to require a third care center, which has been tentatively planned for Hampton Roads in the next four to six years. Likewise, a third cemetery is being considered for Southwest Virginia.

Virginia's veterans have always answered the call in war- or peacetime to protect and project liberty. Likewise, Virginia must continue to keep its solemn promise — honoring its veterans — including an unyielding commitment to funding the future needs of those who answered the call to serve.

■ *A graduate of West Point, John Montgomery retired from the Army after having served as an Airborne Ranger and Inspector General of the Louisiana National Guard. A Sandston resident and lawyer, he advised former Governor Mark Warner on military issues. His Commentary Columns on veterans' issues will appear regularly on the Back Fence.*

## UNCLE SAM'S TEAM

# How Do Armed Forces Get Recruits?

*Where do we get such men?*

— REAR ADM. GEORGE TARRANT, PLAYED BY FREDERIC MARCH, IN THE FILM, "BRIDGES AT TOKO-RI."

So why do people join our armed forces with so many options that seem at first glance to be better choices? This comparatively low-paying profession is rife with dangerous tasks, long periods of family separation, and many hours on duty with no overtime reimbursement. Further, our military system is enveloped by a totally separate system of justice in which the majority of cases are resolved solely by The Boss. It's an organization wherein individual rights are stripped away and slowly given back as perks and privileges. Why would *anybody* want to do it, let alone the thousands who join every year?

While there are risky civilian occupations, there are none where an individual can be *ordered* to perform dangerous tasks with the possibility of being killed or going to jail for non-performance. The worst financial manager in the world could do this cost-benefit analysis in his head, conclude that it has no merit, and head back to his Microsoft Excel spreadsheets where he'll toil until 5:00 p.m. and go home.

It seems reasonable to ask, "What kind of idiot would join in the first place?" A better way to explain it is: "What kind of marketing genius can convince a young man to swap several years of his life for such disincentives and only a vague promise of the possibility of adventure, a terrific experience, and doing something for something larger than oneself?"

Those are great questions with surprising answers. The draft went away more than 30 years ago. Despite gloom-and-doom prophecies from pundits who never wore any kind of uniform, our armed forces continue to do their duty and perform well. Many voluntarily join each of our armed forces every year. And many more re-enlist to stay in. Voluntarily.



## Morale High in Military

Despite those experts in Hollywood, in academia, and in the so-called mainstream media who constantly refer to our military professionals by a derogatory *they* (as contrasted to *we*, the enlightened intelligentsia), morale remains high in the day rooms, ready rooms, posts, bases, ships, aircraft, and military vehicles of all kinds. These are far and away some of the happiest, proudest individuals in the world despite naysaying influencers trying to demoralize them.

Morale, ironically, appears much higher than in the newsrooms of many newspapers, and it was reported thus incredulously by embedded reporters during the race across Iraq.

These wonderful young people — and the military is a young profession — are not idiots. A large percentage falls into the upper reaches of intelligence and vocational aptitude tests. And this is despite an ongoing war — two wars — that probably will last for a while. I'd bet that the average SAT scores entering college of military officers picked at random are higher than those of the contemporary typical critics of the "military-industrial complex" who might be able to turn on a calculator — with special training.

The reasons these volunteers join are many and not intuitive to anyone who has never served. There are certain aspects of military service that have no direct civilian counterpart. Our service personnel are together in their units 24/7, often for months at a time — which is not a normal part of a civilian job. With rare exceptions, there's no automatic compensation for extra work, and most of the military rewards are intrinsic as opposed to buying loyalty with a wad of cash.

There's camaraderie and *esprit de corps* and a feeling that one is doing something for a purpose larger than oneself. The bonds that tie military units and branches and individual services together are strong and have little counterpart in civilian life. For the combat arms, there is adventure and the pride of being the best at what they do. It can be seen following the annual Army-Navy football game, where each team and the Corps of Cadets and Brigade of Midshipmen stand respectfully during the singing of *the other school's alma mater*. This mutual respect shown by teams and student bodies who seconds before had been beating each other's brains out is an encapsulation of all that makes our armed forces great and different.

They know that after graduation they'll all be playing on the same team — Uncle Sam's — but with a much more deadly set of rules.

## Bonds Remain Strong

The bond is created early in service and remains during military tours of duty and for decades afterward. This weekend my Navy squadron, the Black Diamonds of Navy Attack Squadron 216 (VA-216), is meeting in Richmond to dedicate a restoration of one of our aircraft (an A-4).

Nearly every living member of that squadron is here and enjoying a terrific time re-living shipboard life, liberty, and our combat flying missions — harrowing and humorous. And for a brief period of time, each of us is transported to an earlier era where things were simpler, "black and white," and there were actual concrete standards. We toast departed comrades and the young chargers who are carrying the banner now. And each feels a little sorry for those who've never experienced the satisfaction of serving in their country's armed forces.

■ *A Richmond resident, Paul Galanti is a graduate of the U.S. Naval Academy and a retired Navy Commander. A Vietnam veteran, he was a prisoner of war in North Vietnam for nearly seven years. His Commentary Columns regarding veterans' issues will appear regularly on the Back Fence.*

## BREAKING THE CHAIN

# Decision to Fire SecDef Must Come From Civilians

WASHINGTON. One could say much to defend Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld against the recent attacks of half a dozen retired generals — that the indictments are either old ("not enough troops," a trope from April, 2003), vague ("ignoring the Powell doctrine"), plodding ("violating the principles of war," a hazy collection of often-ignored, self-contradictory military platitudes), or downright silly

(being disrespectful in meetings, as though generals would never, ever, be caught dressing down subordinates in front of their peers). Generals, one might note, may yield to vanity and pique, institutional parochialism and thwarted ambition, limited introspection and all the other foibles of proud men. One might, finally, observe that in the unhappy generals' account of Iraq, there is no alternative strategy proposed, no fellow general held to account by name, scant acceptance of personal responsibility for what went awry on their watch, little repudiation of contrary statements made on active duty.

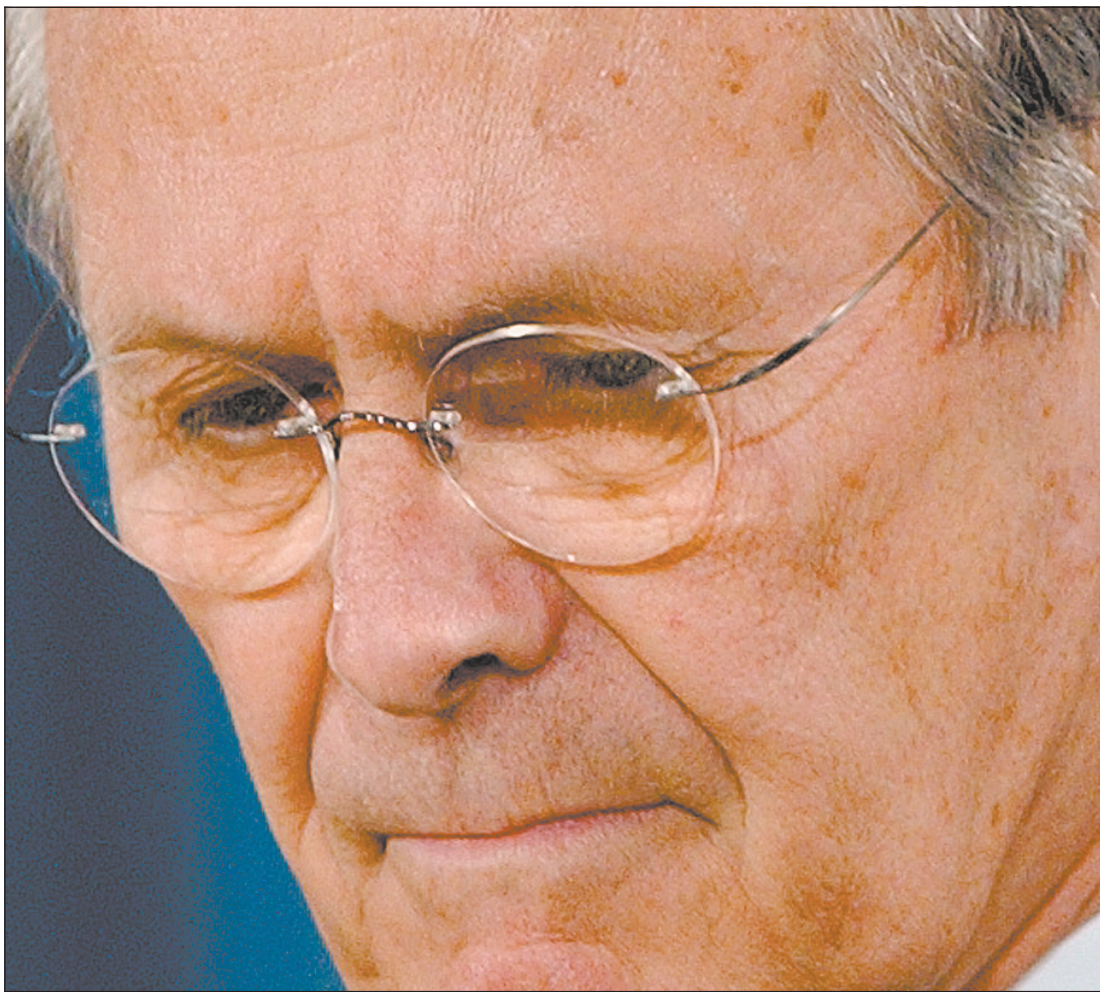
Still, let us stipulate, for the purpose of argument, elements of truth to their fundamental charge of strategic mismanagement, attribute to them only pure motives, and note that serious public figures — Senator John McCain, chiefly — have indeed called for the beleaguered Secretary's resignation, which he in turn, according to press reports, has twice offered the President, to no avail. Is this behavior on the part of the retired generals proper? After all, this is a politically cleaner deed than endorsing candidates for the presidency, a partisan act that meets the silent disapproval of most retired generals, who know that such behavior taints their reputations for politically neutral professionalism.

## Into a Political Fight?

Even making these assumptions and conceding the narrowly defined nonpartisanship of these denunciations, for recently retired general officers to publicly denounce a sitting Secretary of Defense is wrong, destructive of good order and discipline in the armed forces, and prejudicial to functional civil-military relations. It is not the same thing as speaking candidly before Congress, telling all to civilian or military scholars collecting oral histories, or indeed writing one's own memoirs after the heat of contemporary passions has cooled, and the individuals in question have left public office. Rather, this kind of denunciation means leaking into a political fight, and tackling the civilians still charged with the nation's defense. Not the charges themselves, but the arrogation of responsibility is the problem: When things go wrong at the top the civilians should, no doubt, take the heat. But not this way.

Begin by noting that public denunciation will almost surely fail, because no President who thinks much of his role as Commander-in-Chief will throw the top Pentagon civilian overboard to please officers of any kind. If he did, he would establish the precedent that Secretaries of Defense serve at the pleasure of their subordinates, would overturn the most fundamental feature of civilian control of the military, and would neuter his own effectiveness in the conduct of national defense.

Even if ineffectual, however, these declarations do great harm. Retired generals never really leave public service — that's why, after all, we still call them



THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

"general." They set examples for those junior to them in rank, and still on active duty. Imagine, for example, the disgruntled major in the Office of the Secretary of Defense deciding to subvert policy with which he disagrees by, say, leaking confidential memoranda to the press. "Not the same thing," one might respond, but remember that angry majors do not, for the most part, make discriminating moral philosophers. The retired generals have, in effect and perhaps unwittingly, made a case for disloyalty. Indeed, their most troubling belief is that an officer's civilian superiors — and the Secretary of Defense stands in the chain of command just below the President — do not merit the loyalty that they, as military superiors, would deserve and expect.

## Actions Discredit Officers

This controversy has already, predictably, produced anti-Rumsfeld generals and pro-Rumsfeld generals, as earlier controversies produced the pro- and anti-Clinton and pro- and anti-Bush generals. Such squabbling among flag officers brings discredit upon the lot. Furthermore, a politician who, after these and like events, does not think carefully about whether a military subordinate will likely turn on him the moment he takes off the uniform must be exceptionally naïve. No matter how low an opinion a general has of politicians, he is a fool if he thinks them unaware of their own interests. And those interests will lead them to promote flunkies over the prickly but able officers they conceive themselves to be.

A general is equally a fool if he thinks he can engage in partisan polemic without becoming a political target, with all the miseries for himself, and deg-

radation to his honor and profession, that that entails. Generals have not always enjoyed the high reputation for integrity, independence, and dispassionate judgment they do today. That regard stems in large part from the example of soldiers such as Gen. George C. Marshall, chief of staff of the U.S. Army during World War II, who held his tongue in public, even as he argued vehemently with (and often loathed) his President in private.

Accustom the American people to the public sniping and bickering of generals, and generals will soon find that the respect on which they now count has evaporated.

Again, the civilians brought us to this, and in particular politicians of both parties manipulating soldiers as campaign props, and using disgruntled generals to badmouth a President of the opposing party. Democrats and Republicans alike have behaved disgracefully — and the generals are the only ones who can limit the damage. It remains up to them, no matter what, or how well-grounded, their dismay about civilian leaders, to grit their teeth and maintain an honorable and discreet silence, leaving it to those whose responsibility it is — the President, Congress, and ultimately the voters — to decide whether and when a Secretary of Defense should leave his office.

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■ *Eliot A. Cohen is a professor at Johns Hopkins University and the author of "Supreme Command: Soldiers, Statesmen, and Leadership in Wartime."*